

PETER'S LAST WORDS SEVEN STEPS TO SPIRITUAL SUCCESS

Today I want to ask a very basic but important question: How can we make sure we are effective and productive Christians?

If you could ask someone for his advice on this, you would probably ask Jesus Christ. But there's also someone else who should be able to give good counsel.

The advice we're going to look at today comes from someone who:

- ◆ was one of the 12 disciples
- ◆ was one of the inner circle of disciples, and a leader amongst them
- ◆ had seen the power of Jesus and the coming of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost
- ◆ had performed miracles and led many people to Christ
- ◆ had walked on water

You probably know who it was now! When Peter was about to die, he wrote the Church a letter to say what he had learned about living the Christian life, and told them a few things to do that would ensure a successful and fruitful Christian life.

He gave us **7 steps to spiritual success**. Let's have a look at them, in 2 Peter 1. Notice verses 14-15 show he was about to die when he wrote this.

“¹⁴because I know that I will soon put it aside, as our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. ¹⁵And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.”

So what does this book say, recording the important last things he wanted to say to the church?

2 Peter 1:1-4 ¹“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, To those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours: ²Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord. ³His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and goodness. ⁴Through these He has given us His very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

God has already done His part – and continues to do so. He has given us everything we need for success. Notice some of the things He has given us.

Verse 1 – Faith;

Verse 2 – Grace, Peace, Knowledge;

Verse 3 – “everything we need for a godly life”;

Verse 4 – Promises, the opportunity to partake of the divine nature, escape from corruption.

But we have a part to do too, and that's what we'll look at in the sermon. The seven steps we need to follow are outlined in Verses 5-7.

Simple, eh? Just 3 little verses that are the key to spiritual success, and partaking of the divine nature.

But the first 3 words are a bit of a worry, if we think it is going to be easy.

“Make every effort (NIV) - “Giving all diligence” (KJV)

Living the Christian life isn't just a “piece of cake,” where you sit back and do nothing and expect the blood of Jesus to give you salvation. Effort is required of Christians, and diligent effort. That's why the Christian life is compared to a race at the Olympic Games. It involves strenuous effort and discipline.

We start off with faith. Believing, trusting, relying on God. That is the basic starting point. The Church Peter writes to already had it – Verse 1.

“Simon Peter, a servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who through the righteousness of our God and Saviour Jesus Christ have received a faith as precious as ours:”

Hebrews 11:6 “And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.”

Without faith you don't even get off the starting blocks – it is essential as a foundation.

Again here we see promise of rewards, and the necessity to diligently seek Him. How do we diligently seek Him? What do we need to add to our faith in order to be successful Christians? There are 7 things Peter says should be added to our faith – 7 steps to spiritual success.

2 Peter 1:5-7 ⁵“For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; ⁶and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; ⁷and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love.”

The Greek word translated “add” here was used of making a rich and lavish provision – it described the great generosity of wealthy citizens who would finance a theatrical extravaganza – something like the lavish provision of fireworks for Olympic Games Ceremonies. So we should lavishly add these qualities to our lives.

One writer on this passage mentioned that faith without works is dead, so these 7 qualities are 7 “works” to add to our faith to make it living faith.

1. Virtue (KJV) This is translated “Goodness” in the NIV, and refers to being good morally and ethically, and doing good things. Being pure and good inside, through and through, and practicing our faith by doing good works. But in order to do good things we need to know what is good, so that is why the second thing we need to add to our faith is:

2. Knowledge. A commentary states “Gnosis (*the word used here*) is that knowledge that enables a person to decide rightly and act honourably and efficiently in the day to day circumstances and situations of life.”

How do we get that kind of knowledge? The Bible is full of it! Solomon taught us to pursue it with all of our hearts when he wrote:

Proverbs 3:13-15 ¹³“Blessed are those who find wisdom, those who gain understanding, ¹⁴for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. ¹⁵She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her.”

But Solomon's lifestyle reminds us that knowledge isn't enough. For even though Solomon was the wisest man of the day, he still ended up ruining his life, doing one of the things he had warned against in Proverbs – pursuing and marrying hundreds of women! That's where the next step comes in:

3. Temperance (KJV) or Self Control (NIV)

Solomon should have known better than to let his life be dominated by lust. He himself said in Proverbs 16:32 "Better a patient person than a warrior, one with self-control than one who takes a city."

But knowing what God wants us to do isn't enough. We have to do it. And that takes self control. The Greek word means the ability to "take a grip of oneself." Sometimes that's what we need to do with ourselves. This is something we have to constantly work on. Can we control our tongues from passing on a juicy morsel of gossip? Control our desire to judge or criticise others? Get a grip on our anger? Control and discipline our attitudes and thoughts?

It's not easy – it's a constant challenge to be a Christian. But "self control" is one of the "fruits of the Spirit", so this is something we can receive from God.

Galatians 5:23 "gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."

And when we have self control, the next thing we need is to keep that up, to maintain it, so the next step is:

4. Patience (KJV) or Perseverance (NIV)

Bravely facing whatever challenges life throws at us, and suffering through many difficult things, for the good that will result in the end. Jesus endured in this way.

Hebrews 12:2-3 ²"fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before Him He endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³Consider Him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart."

We just have to keep plugging on, continuing in the faith and resisting the pressures of the world system and those around us who don't do things God's way.

A big key to being able to endure is to set your eyes on God. So that's why Peter noted the next step to be:

5. Godliness – This refers to being like God. We need to try, in every circumstance we face in life, to think and act like God would. To ask, "What would Jesus do?"

How can we do that? One thing that helps is Bible study – we need to know what God is like, and then we try to imitate that as much as we can.

Another key is prayer. The closer we are to God, the more we will become like Him and reflect Him out to others.

Proverbs 3:5-6 ³"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; ⁶in all your ways submit to Him, and He will make your paths straight."

This is a great passage of scripture. Acknowledge God in everything – walk with Him in life. One commentary defines godliness as “a very practical awareness of God in every aspect of life.” A book was written “Practicing the Presence of God.” If we were fully aware of God’s presence at every second of our life, we would never sin.

Colossians 1:10 “so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please Him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God,”

Another fantastic verse!

6. The next step is Brotherly kindness (KJV) or Mutual Affection (NIV). Greek: *Philadelphia*.

Romans 12:10 speaks of this. “Be devoted to one another in love. Honour one another above yourselves.”

If we have godliness, and love God, we will show it by loving our brother. And if we don’t love one another, that proves we don’t love God!

1 John 4:20 “Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.”

7. The final step is LOVE (charity – KJV) – the Queen of all the Virtues, the very nature of God summed up in one word. The Greek word is “*agape*”.

Love goes beyond brotherly kindness to include love for all people – even our enemies. Christ demonstrated this by dying for us even when we were hostile enemies towards Him. We can read about *agape* love in 1 Corinthians 13. Godly people who participate in the divine nature must abound in love.

If we do follow these steps, the next 4 verses show us the fantastic things that will happen to us.

2 Peter 1:8-11 (NIV) ⁸“For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁹But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins. ¹⁰Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble, ¹¹and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.”

We should be increasing in these things, growing in them more and more. And then we will:

- ◆ Be effective, productive Christians
- ◆ Not be blind (Verse 9)
- ◆ Never stumble (Verse 10)
- ◆ Be welcomed into the Kingdom of God!

Verses 12-13 ¹²“So I will always remind you of these things, even though you know them and are firmly established in the truth you now have. ¹³I think it is right to refresh your memory as long as I live in the tent of this body”

Today we’ve had a reminder of these things. It’s good to have our memories refreshed on these basic but important qualities we need to have in our lives, so we will receive a rich welcome into the eternal Kingdom of Jesus Christ!